



## EMPLOYABILITY

Call for Papers to be Published in *Research in the Sociology of Work*

Rick Delbridge, Markus Helfen, Andi Pekarek, and Gretchen Purser, editors

Employability has become an increasingly widespread concept both in management and policy, reflecting significant transformations in the world of work. Employability refers to a broad and amorphous collection of personal characteristics that purportedly make someone more able to gain and maintain employment. It points beyond hard skills to things like attitude, flexibility, emotional intelligence, resilience, initiative, and character. Framed as an attribute of a person, individuals are thus lauded as “employable” or dismissed as “unemployable.” This rhetoric of employability is intensely individualizing, shifting attention away from labor market structures and dynamics and towards one’s self and personal capabilities and shortcomings. Rarely asking the question of what “employability” may mean for employing organizations, employability works hand in hand with the neoliberal doctrine on individual responsibility and commodification, legitimating unemployment and labor market marginalization. Thus responsibility – for skills development and employment opportunities – falls to individuals not employers and the state.

Yet, for the individual worker, employability itself appears as a moving target and a never secure status. Employability is therefore deemed to be something one must constantly pursue, particularly given the precarious character of work and the erosion of long-term employment relationships. For those in employment, the aggressive promotion and unending pursuit of employability have exacerbated all those unremunerated but time-consuming activities that do not count as work but are required to sell oneself to an employer and/or keep a toehold in the labor market: networking, training, resume writing, character building, skill acquiring.

For those out of employment, employability animates a labor market policy in which all kinds of state and nonprofit programs and street-level bureaucrats focus on helping individuals navigate and maximize their chances in the labor market including “reprogramming” those deemed “hard-to-employ”. The individualizing discourse of employability extends to coping with job loss and the encouragement to be resilient and resourceful. Employability has similarly come to shape schooling, vocational training, and higher education policy, with universities and schools increasingly offering “career readiness” certification and subordinating academic aspirations to hypothetical employer demands for ever-more “employable” job candidates.

This special issue of *Research in the Sociology of Work* invites papers that explore all aspects of employability. We welcome both empirical and conceptual papers. Articles may address any of a wide range of topics and themes, including but not limited to the following:

- Employability programs
- Employability and labor market policy
- The politics of employability
- Employability and educational practices and policies
- The cultural rhetoric of employability
- The “unemployable”
- Employability and disability
- Employability, inclusivity and inequality
- Gender, race, and employability
- Employability and identity
- Institutions of employability
- Unions and employability
- Employability in operation: HRM policy and practice
- Employment management work
- Employers and employability: Regulation and responsibilities
- Working time and employability investments

Submissions may be made at any time up until January 1, 2023. Please submit your manuscript to [RSWeditors@gmail.com](mailto:RSWeditors@gmail.com) and include “Employability” in the subject line.

Calls for papers appear here: <https://books.emeraldinsight.com/page/series-detail/Research-in-the-Sociology-of-Work/>

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